

Testimony before Finance Committee
****Support****

SB 539 – Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment

February 27, 2020

Maryland’s Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW – MD), which represents professional social workers across the state, supports SB 539 – Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment.

The establishment of a Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program in Maryland would allow families to take up to 12 weeks of paid leave to care for the birth or adoption of a child, family members with serious health conditions or disabilities, family members who are leaving for military deployment, or for their own health conditions.

Many Social Workers work on a fee-for-service basis. When faced with a new child or serious health condition, they are forced to choose between working and taking care of family members or themselves. The loss of this income can be detrimental to the worker and their families in a time of heightened need. SB 539 would be beneficial to the workers NASW – MD represents who spend their time serving the community. It would also benefit the self-employed workers in Maryland, including many social workers running individual practices. 2018 census data reports 8.4% of Maryland’s workers are self-employed.¹ Social Workers and other individual business owners will be able to opt into the Family and Medical Leave Insurance program and continue to support their families when extra care is needed.

Marylanders should not have to choose between caring for their family and keeping a roof over their heads. The majority of employees in the United States do not have access to paid family leave.² SB 539 would especially benefit low-wage workers who disproportionately lack access to this benefit. For these families, lost pay can mean losing the ability to pay the rent or electric bills. Implementing a paid family leave program increases health, housing, and financial security of Marylanders living in or near poverty.

Access to paid Family and Medical Leave is a social justice issue. In 2018, full-time male employees made 1.27 times more than female employees in Maryland.³ People of color on average earn significantly less than white workers and women of color are more likely to be the breadwinner and caregiver for their family.^{4,5} These economic disparities make it increasingly difficult for people of color and female-headed households to accommodate lost wages when family members need additional care. SB 539 will improve racial equity in the workplace and help families facing heightened barriers stay housed and healthy.

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Maryland's future depends on its youngest residents. Recent advances in early childhood development research tell us that early relationships and experiences give children the skills they need to remain healthy and to succeed in school, relationships and in the workforce as they age. When parents are able to take leave to care for family members without the added stress of lost wages, children experience stable and positive relationships at home. SB 539 is critical to getting Maryland's children off to a strong start to become healthy and productive members of the community.

We ask that you give a favorable report on SB 539.

Respectfully,

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¹U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey: Industry by Occupation for the Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over, 2018*.

https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all?g=0400000US24&t=Industry%3AOccupation&tid=ACST1Y2018.S2405&vintage=2017&y=2018&hidePreview=false&cid=S2405_C01_001E

²U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2018*. <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2018/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2018.pdf>;

³Data USA. (n.d.). *Maryland*. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/maryland#education>

⁴The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP).

https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/12/2018_pfmliscriticalfor_0.pdf

⁵National Partnership for Women and Families. <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>